

WEIGHTED FAIR QUEUE HAVING ADJUSTABLE SCALING FACTORCROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED PATENT APPLICATIONS

The present application is related to the following U.S. Patent Applications, each of which is hereby
5 incorporated by reference herein in its entirety:

U.S. Patent Application Serial No. _____, filed _____,
titled "WEIGHTED FAIR QUEUE HAVING EXTENDED EFFECTIVE RANGE"
(IBM Docket No. ROC920010199US1);

10 U.S. Patent Application Serial No. _____, filed _____,
titled "WEIGHTED FAIR QUEUE SERVING PLURAL OUTPUT PORTS"
(IBM Docket No. ROC920010200US1);

15 U.S. Patent Application Serial No. _____, filed _____,
titled "EMPTY INDICATORS FOR WEIGHTED FAIR QUEUES" (IBM
Docket No. ROC920010202US1);

20 U.S. Patent Application Serial No. _____, filed _____,
titled "QoS SCHEDULER AND METHOD FOR IMPLEMENTING PEAK
SERVICE DISTANCE USING NEXT PEAK SERVICE TIME VIOLATED
INDICATION" (IBM Docket No. ROC920010203US1);

25 U.S. Patent Application Serial No. _____, filed _____,
titled "QoS SCHEDULER AND METHOD FOR IMPLEMENTING QUALITY OF
SERVICE WITH AGING STAMPS" (IBM Docket No. ROC920010204US1);

30 U.S. Patent Application Serial No. _____, filed _____,
titled "QoS SCHEDULER AND METHOD FOR IMPLEMENTING QUALITY OF
SERVICE WITH CACHED STATUS ARRAY" (IBM Docket No.
ROC920010205US1); and

U.S. Patent Application Serial No. _____, filed _____,
titled "QoS SCHEDULER AND METHOD FOR IMPLEMENTING QUALITY OF
SERVICE ANTICIPATING THE END OF A CHAIN OF FLOWS" (IBM
Docket No. ROC920010206US1).

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is concerned with data and
storage communication systems and is more particularly
concerned with a scheduler component of a network processor.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Data and storage communication networks are in
widespread use. In many data and storage communication
networks, data packet switching is employed to route data
packets or frames from point to point between source and
destination, and network processors are employed to handle
transmission of data into and out of data switches.

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FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustration of a
conventional network processor in which the present
invention may be applied. The network processor, which is
generally indicated by reference numeral 10, may be
constituted by a number of components mounted on a card or
"blade". Within a data communication network, a
considerable number of blades containing network processors
may be interposed between a data switch and a data network.

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The network processor 10 includes data flow chips
12 and 14. The first data flow chip 12 is connected to a
data switch 15 (shown in phantom) via first switch ports 16,
and is connected to a data network 17 (shown in phantom) via
first network ports 18. The first data flow chip 12 is

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positioned on the ingress side of the switch 15 and handles data frames that are inbound to the switch 15.

The second data flow chip 14 is connected to the switch 15 via second switch ports 20 and is connected to the data network 17 via second network ports 22. The second data flow chip 14 is positioned on the egress side of the switch 15 and handles data frames that are outbound from the switch 15.

As shown in FIG. 1, a first data buffer 24 is coupled to the first data flow chip 12. The first data buffer 24 stores inbound data frames pending transmission of the inbound data frames to the switch 15. A second data buffer 26 is coupled to the second data flow chip 14, and stores outbound data frames pending transmission of the outbound data frames to the data network 17.

The network processor 10 also includes a first processor chip 28 coupled to the first data flow chip 12. The first processor chip 28 supervises operation of the first data flow chip 12 and may include multiple processors. A second processor chip 30 is coupled to the second data flow chip 14, supervises operation of the second data flow chip 14 and may include multiple processors.

A control signal path 32 couples an output terminal of second data flow chip 14 to an input terminal of first data flow chip 12 (e.g., to allow transmission of data frames therebetween).

The network processor 10 further includes a first scheduler chip 34 coupled to the first data flow chip 12. The first scheduler chip 34 manages the sequence in which inbound data frames are transmitted to the switch 15 via first switch ports 16. A first memory 36 such as a fast

SRAM is coupled to the first scheduler chip 34 (e.g., for storing data frame pointers and flow control information as described further below). The first memory 36 may be, for example, a QDR (quad data rate) SRAM.

5 A second scheduler chip 38 is coupled to the second data flow chip 14. The second scheduler chip 38 manages the sequence in which data frames are output from the second network ports 22 of the second data flow chip 14. Coupled to the second scheduler chip 38 are at least one and
10 possibly two memories (e.g., fast SRAMs 40) for storing data frame pointers and flow control information. The memories 40 may, like the first memory 36, be QDRs. The additional memory 40 on the egress side of the network processor 10 may be needed because of a larger number of flows output through
15 the second network ports 22 than through the first switch ports 16.

FIG. 2 schematically illustrates conventional queuing arrangements that may be provided for a data flow chip/scheduler pair (either the first data flow chip 12 and
20 the first scheduler chip 34 or the second data flow chip 14 and the second scheduler chip 38) of the network processor 10 of FIG. 1. In the particular example illustrated in FIG. 2, the first data flow chip 12 and the first scheduler chip 34 are illustrated, but a very similar queuing arrangement
25 may be provided in connection with the second data flow chip 14 and the second scheduler chip 38. In the queuing arrangement for the first data flow chip 12 and the first scheduler chip 34, incoming data frames (from data network 17) are buffered in the input data buffer 24 associated with
30 the first data flow chip 12 (FIG. 1). Each data frame is associated with a data flow or "flow". As is familiar to

those who are skilled in the art, a "flow" represents a one-way connection between a source and a destination.

Flows with which the incoming data frames are associated are enqueued in a scheduling queue 42 maintained in the first scheduler chip 34. The scheduling queue 42 defines a sequence in which the flows enqueued therein are to be serviced. The particular scheduling queue 42 of interest in connection with the present invention is a weighted fair queue which arbitrates among flows entitled to a "best effort" or "available bandwidth" Quality of Service (QoS).

As shown in FIG. 2, the scheduling queue 42 is associated with a respective output port 44 of the first data flow chip 12. It is to be understood that the output port 44 is one of the first switch ports 16 illustrated in FIG. 1. (However, if the data flow chip/scheduler pair under discussion were the egress side data flow chip 14 and scheduler chip 38, then the output port 44 would be one of the network ports 22.) Although only one scheduling queue 42 and one corresponding output port 44 are shown, it should be understood that in fact there may be plural output ports and corresponding scheduling queues each assigned to a respective port. (However, according to an alternative embodiment, disclosed in co-pending patent application Serial No. _____, filed _____ (Attorney Docket No. ROC920010200US1), a group of output ports may be associated with each scheduling queue 42. This co-pending patent application is incorporated herein by reference.)

Although not indicated in FIG. 2, the first scheduler chip 34 also includes flow scheduling calendars which define output schedules for flows which are entitled

to a scheduled QoS with guaranteed bandwidth, thus enjoying higher priority than the flows governed by the scheduling queue 42.

5 The memory 36 associated with the first scheduler chip 34 holds pointers ("frame pointers") to locations in the first data buffer 24 corresponding to data frames associated with the flows enqueued in the scheduling queue 42. The memory 36 also stores flow control information, such as information indicative of the QoS to which flows are
10 entitled.

When the scheduling queue 42 indicates that a particular flow enqueued therein is the next to be serviced, reference is made to the frame pointer in the memory 36 corresponding to the first pending data frame for the flow
15 in question and the corresponding frame data is transferred from the first data buffer 24 to an output queue 46 associated with the output port 44.

A more detailed representation of the scheduling queue 42 is shown in FIG. 3. As noted above, the scheduling
20 queue 42 is used for weighted fair queuing of flows serviced on a "best effort" basis. In a particular example of a scheduling queue as illustrated in FIG. 3, the scheduling queue 42 has 512 slots (each slot represented by reference numeral 48). Other numbers of slots may be employed. In
25 accordance with conventional practice, flows are enqueued or attached to the scheduling queue 42 based on a formula that takes into account both a length of a data frame associated with a flow to be enqueued and a weight which corresponds to a QoS to which the flow is entitled.

30 More specifically, the queue slot in which a flow is placed upon enqueueing is calculated according to the

formula $CP + ((WF \times FS)/SF)$, where CP is a pointer ("current pointer") that indicates a current position (the slot currently being serviced) in the scheduling queue 42; WF is a weighting factor associated with the flow to be enqueued, the weighting factor having been determined on the basis of the QoS to which the flow is entitled; FS is the size of the current frame associated with the flow to be enqueued; and SF is a scaling factor chosen to scale the product $(WF \times FS)$ so that the resulting quotient falls within the range defined by the scheduling queue 42. (In accordance with conventional practice, the scaling factor SF is conveniently defined as a integral power of 2 -- i.e., $SF = 2^n$, with n being a positive integer -- so that scaling the product $(WF \times FS)$ is performed by right shifting.) With this known weighted fair queuing technique, the weighting factors assigned to the various flows in accordance with the QoS assigned to each flow govern how close to the current pointer of the queue each flow is enqueued. In addition, flows which exhibit larger frame sizes are enqueued farther from the current pointer of the queue, to prevent such flows from appropriating an undue proportion of the available bandwidth of the queue. Upon enqueueement, data that identifies a flow (the "Flow ID") is stored in the appropriate queue slot 48.

In some applications, there may be a wide range of data frame sizes associated with the flows, perhaps on the order of about 64 bytes to 64KB, or three orders of magnitude. It may also be desirable to assign a large range of weighting factors to the flows so that bandwidth can be sold with a great deal of flexibility and precision. In practice, however, it is difficult to predict at the time of

designing or initializing the scheduler chip 34 what will be the characteristics of the data packets handled by the scheduler chip 34. Consequently, it is difficult to anticipate over what range of values the product $(WF \times FS)$ will fall during operation of the network processor 10. As a result, the scaling factor SF may be chosen to be a value that is too large or too small. If the value of SF is chosen to be too small, then the enqueueement distance $D = ((WF \times FS)/SF)$ may overrun the range R of the scheduling queue 42. If this occurs, an error condition may result, or the enqueueement distance D may be reduced to equal the range R of the scheduling queue 42, resulting in a failure to properly perform the desired weighted fair queuing.

If the scaling factor SF is chosen to be too large, then all of the flows to be enqueued may be attached relatively close to the current pointer of the scheduling queue 42. As a result, the full resources of the range of the scheduling queue 42 may not be used, again possibly resulting in a failure to precisely perform the desired weighted fair queuing.

It would accordingly be desirable to overcome the potential drawbacks of setting the scaling factor SF either too low or too high.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to an aspect of the invention, a scheduler for a network processor is provided. The scheduler includes a scheduling queue in which weighted fair queuing is applied. The scheduling queue has a range R. Flows are attached to the scheduling queue at a distance D from a current pointer for the scheduling queue. The

distance D is calculated for each flow according to the formula $D = ((WF \times FS)/SF)$, where WF is a weighting factor applicable to a respective flow; FS is a frame size attributable to the respective flow; and SF is a scaling factor. The scaling factor SF is adjusted depending on a result of comparing the distance D to the range R.

In at least one embodiment, the scaling factor SF may be increased if D is greater than R. For example, the scaling factor SF may be increased if D exceeds R in regard to a predetermined number of calculations of D.

In one or more embodiments, the scaling factor SF may be decreased if D is less than $R/2$. For example, the scaling factor SF may be decreased if D is less than one-half R in regard to a predetermined number of calculations of D.

In some embodiments, the scaling factor SF may equal 2^n , where n is a positive integer. For example, n may be incremented to increase SF, or may be decremented to decrease SF.

According to another aspect of the invention, a method of managing a scheduling queue in a scheduler for a network processor is provided. The scheduling queue has a range R. Flows are attached to the scheduling queue at a distance D from a current pointer for the scheduling queue, the distance D being calculated for each flow according to the formula $D = ((WF \times FS)/SF)$, where WF is a weighting factor applicable to a respective flow, FS is a frame size attributable to the respective flow, and SF is a scaling factor. The method includes calculating the distance D with respect to a particular flow to be enqueued, comparing the

distance D to the range R, and adjusting the scaling factor SF based on a result of the comparing step.

In a scheduler provided in accordance with the invention, an initial value at which the scaling factor SF is set may be adjusted adaptively during operation of the scheduler to reflect actual experience with data handled by the scheduler, so that the scaling factor SF assumes a value that is suitable for using the range R of the scheduling queue and/or such that the enqueue distance D does not overrun the range R of the scheduling queue.

Other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become more fully apparent from the following detailed description of exemplary embodiments, the appended claims and the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a conventional network processor in which the present invention may be applied;

FIG. 2 is a block diagram representation of conventional queuing arrangements provided in a data flow chip/scheduler pair included in the network processor of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a pictorial representation of a weighted fair queuing scheduling queue provided in accordance with conventional practices;

FIG. 4 is a flow chart that illustrates a process provided in accordance with the invention to increase the value of a scaling factor when a range of a scheduling queue is overrun;

FIG. 5 is a flow chart that illustrates a process provided in accordance with the invention to decrease the value of a scaling factor when a range of a scheduling queue is underutilized;

5 FIGS. 6A and 6B together form a flow chart that illustrates a process provided in accordance with the invention to increase and/or decrease a scaling factor in response to overrunning or underutilizing a range of a scheduling queue;

10 FIG. 7A is a block diagram of an inventive scheduler for use with the processes of FIGS. 4 and 5; and

 FIG. 7B is a block diagram of an inventive scheduler for use with the processes of FIGS. 6A and 6B.

15 DETAILED DESCRIPTION

 Adjustment of a scaling factor SF of a scheduler in accordance with the invention will now be described, initially with reference to FIG. 4 and the conventional network processor 10 of FIGS. 1-3. It will be understood
20 that the present invention may be employed with any suitable conventional network processor.

 FIG. 4 is a flow chart that illustrates a process provided in accordance with the invention for increasing the value of a scaling factor SF in response to overrunning the
25 range R of the scheduling queue 42 (FIG. 2). In the particular example of the scheduling queue 42 described above, the range R of the scheduling queue 42 corresponds to the number of slots 48, i.e. $R = 512$. Other ranges may be employed. In accordance with the inventive process of FIG.
30 4, and as described further below, the schedulers 34 and/or 38 may be provided with a counter C0 as shown in FIG. 7A.

The counter C0 may comprise any conventional counter, whether hardware or software based.

Initially in FIG. 4 is block 50, at which a flow is attached to the scheduling queue 42 using the current value of the scaling factor SF. That is, the enqueueement distance D is calculated according to the conventional formula $D = ((WF \times FS)/SF)$. Enqueueement can occur in one of two ways. The first way is a "new attach" situation, in which, for a flow having no frames corresponding to it, a new frame arrives, and the flow is attached to the scheduling queue 42 in response to arrival of the new frame. The second way is a "reattach" situation, in which a flow is already enqueued in the scheduling queue 42 and is picked as a winner (because it is closest to the head of the queue and no higher priority service intervenes), a frame is dispatched with respect to the flow, and the flow is rescheduled on the scheduling queue 42 because there is at least one more frame to be dispatched from the flow.

Following block 50 is decision block 52. In decision block 52 it is determined whether the enqueueement distance D exceeded (overran) the range R of the scheduling queue 42. If not, the procedure of FIG. 4 simply returns (block 54) so that the scheduling queue 42 may perform conventional queue operations (not described).

However, if it is determined at decision block 52 that the enqueueement distance D overran the range R of the scheduling queue 42, then block 56 follows decision block 52. At block 56, a value of the counter C0 (FIG. 7A) is incremented. Any suitable counter may be employed (e.g., a hardware or software based counter).

Following block 56 is decision block 58. At decision block 58, it is determined whether the incremented counter value exceeds a predetermined threshold. This threshold (and other thresholds discussed below) can be set in a variety of ways. For example, the threshold can be determined by software if the software has information concerning the flows/frames to be handled. If so, the scaling factor SF can be set accurately based on the flows/frames that are expected. The software would then set the threshold to handle flows that misbehave. For example, if it is not desired to tolerate an occasional frame that causes the enqueue distance D to exceed the range R, then the threshold may be set to zero. If system requirements allow some misbehaving flows to be tolerated, then the threshold may be set higher.

If the software has no information concerning the flows/frames that to be handled, then an arbitrary value for the initial value of the scaling factor SF can be chosen, and the threshold can be set so that the scaling factor SF is increased rapidly if the range R of the scheduling queue 42 is exceeded. (A threshold for decreasing the scaling factor SF, to be discussed below, may be set so that the scaling factor SF is decreased slowly if the flows are all being scheduled in the lower part of the scheduling queue 42.) These threshold values would allow the system to quickly adapt to unknown input.

If a positive determination is made at decision block 58, the procedure returns (block 54). However, if it is determined at decision block 58 that the predetermined threshold is exceeded by the incremented counter value, then block 60 follows decision block 58.

At block 60 the value of the scaling factor SF is increased. This may be done in a number of ways. For example, if the scaling factor SF is expressed as an integral power of 2 (i.e., 2^n), then the scaling factor SF may be doubled by incrementing the value of n (e.g., via a left shifting operation as previously described, such as left shifting a register (not shown) in which the scaling factor is stored). It is contemplated, alternatively, to increase SF by a factor other than two.

Following block 60 is block 62 at which the counter C0 is reset. The procedure of FIG. 4 then returns (block 54) so that the scheduling queue 42 may perform conventional queue operations (not described).

It will be appreciated that the procedure of FIG. 4 operates so that when the range of the scheduling queue 42 is overrun a certain number of times (e.g., as set by the predetermined threshold), the value of the scaling factor SF is increased, to reduce the likelihood of overrunning the range of the scheduling queue 42 in the future. Thus the initial value of the scaling factor SF can be set at a low value, and the scheduler 34 (FIG. 2) can be allowed, in operation, to increase the value of the scaling factor SF to adapt to the actual characteristics of the data traffic, so that, after an initial period, overrunning of the range of the scheduling queue 42 does not occur.

FIG. 5 is a flow chart that represents a procedure provided in accordance with the invention for decreasing the value of the scaling factor SF of the scheduler 34 of FIG. 2 in response to underutilization of the range of the scheduling queue 42. As with the procedure of FIG. 4, the procedure of FIG. 5 may be employed with other schedulers

and/or scheduling queues, and employs the counter C0 (FIG. 7A).

The procedure of FIG. 5 begins with block 70 which is like block 50 of FIG. 4 (e.g., a flow is attached to the scheduling queue 42 using the current value of the scaling factor SF during calculation of the enqueueement distance D). Following block 70 is a decision block 72. At decision block 72 it is determined whether the enqueueement distance D calculated in block 70 is less than one-half the range R of the scheduling queue 42. If the enqueueement distance D is found to be less than one-half the range R of the scheduling queue 42, then block 74 follows decision block 72. (If the scaling factor SF is decreased by a factor other than two, then the enqueueement distance D is advantageously to be compared to something other than one-half of the range R. For example, if the scaling factor SF is to be decreased by a factor of 4, then the enqueueement distance D may be compared to one-fourth of the range R.)

At block 74 a value of the counter C0 is incremented. Following block 74 is decision block 76 at which it is determined whether the incremented counter value is greater than a predetermined threshold. If not, the procedure of FIG. 5 returns (block 78). However, if it is found at decision block 76 that the incremented counter value exceeds the predetermined threshold, then block 80 follows decision block 76.

At block 80 the value of the scaling factor SF is decreased. The decreasing of the value of the scaling factor SF may occur in a number of ways. For example, if the scaling factor SF is expressed as a power of 2 (i.e., 2^n) then the scaling factor SF may be halved by decrementing

n (e.g., by right shifting a register (not shown) in which the scaling factor is stored). It is contemplated, alternatively, to decrease the scaling factor SF by a factor other than two.

5 Following block 80 is block 82, at which the counter C0 is reset. The procedure of FIG. 5 then returns (block 78).

 Considering again decision block 72, if it is determined at that decision block that the enqueue-
10 distance D is not less than one-half the range R of the scheduling queue 42, then block 84 follows decision block 72. At block 84 the counter C0 is reset, and the procedure of FIG. 5 then returns (block 78). The counter C0 is reset because, if the upper part of the scheduling queue 42 is
15 ever used, then the scaling factor SF will not be too large.

 With the procedure of FIG. 5, the value of the scaling factor SF can be set to a high value, in anticipation of a wide range of enqueue-
20 distances that may be encountered during processing of data frames. In the event that the high value of the scaling factor leads to underutilization of the range of the scheduling queue, the procedure of FIG. 5 will adaptively decrease the value of the scaling factor to a value that is well suited to the actual characteristics of the data that is being processed.

25 FIGS. 6A and 6B together form a flow chart that illustrates a procedure provided in accordance with the invention and by which the value of the scaling factor SF of the scheduler 42 of FIG. 2 can be either increased or decreased to adapt to characteristics of the data handled by
30 the network processor 10. In accordance with the inventive process of FIGS. 6A and 6B, and as described further below,

the schedulers 34 and/or 38 may be provided with a first counter C1 and a second counter C2 as shown in FIG. 7B. The counters C1 and C2 may comprise any conventional counters, whether hardware or software based.

Initially in the procedure of FIGS. 6A and 6B is a block 90, which entails the same activity as block 50 of FIG. 4 (e.g., a flow is attached to the scheduling queue 42 using the current value of the scaling factor SF during calculation of the enqueue distance D). Following block 90 is a decision block 92 at which it is determined whether the enqueue distance D is greater than the range R of the scheduling queue 42. If it is determined at decision block 92 that the enqueue distance D exceeded the range R of the scheduling queue 42, then a value of the first counter C1 (FIG. 7B) is incremented (block 94). Following block 94 is a decision block 96. At decision block 96 it is determined whether the value of the first counter C1 is greater than a first threshold. If not, then the procedure returns (block 98). However, if it is determined at decision block 96 that the value of the first counter C1 exceeds the first threshold, then the value of the scaling factor SF is increased (block 100). This may be done, for example, by incrementing the value of n, where SF is expressed as 2^n , or by any other technique.

Following block 100 is block 102. At block 102 the first counter C1 is reset. The second counter C2 (FIG. 7B) also is reset. (As will be seen, the second counter C2 is involved with determining whether to decrease the value of the scaling factor SF in response to underutilization of the range R of the scheduling queue 42.) Following block 102 the procedure of FIGS. 6A and 6B returns (block 98).

Considering again decision block 92, if it is determined at decision block 92 that the enqueueement distance D is not greater than the range R of the scheduling queue 42, then decision block 104 (FIG. 6B) follows decision block 92. At decision block 104 it is determined whether the enqueueement distance D is less than one-half of the range R of the scheduling queue 42. If the enqueueement distance D is less than one-half the range R, then block 106 follows decision block 104.

At block 106, the value of the second counter C2 is incremented. Following block 106 is decision block 108, at which it is determined whether the value of the second counter C2 is greater than a second threshold. If not, the procedure returns (block 98). However, if it is determined at decision block 108 that the value of the second counter C2 is greater than the second threshold, then block 110 follows decision block 108. At decision block 110 the value of the scaling factor SF is decreased. This may be done, for example, by decrementing n where SF is expressed as 2^n , or by any other technique.

Following block 110 is block 112. At block 112 the first and second counters C1, C2 are reset. The procedure then returns (block 98).

Considering again decision block 104, if it is determined at decision block 104 that the enqueueement distance D is not less than one-half the range R of the scheduling queue 42, then block 114 follows decision block 104. At block 114 the second counter C2 is reset. The procedure of FIGS. 6A and 6B then returns (block 98).

In one embodiment of the procedure of FIGS. 6A and 6B, the scaling factor SF may initially be set at 2^7 (i.e.,

128). The first threshold may be set to be 0 (i.e., the scaling factor SF is increased each time the range R is overrun), and the second threshold may be set to be 8 (i.e. 9 consecutive enqueueements in the lower half of the scheduling queue 42 result in decreasing the scaling factor SF).

In the procedure of FIGS. 6A and 6B, the scaling factor SF may be set at an intermediate value or an arbitrary value, and the scheduler 34 (when configured in accordance with the present invention) then operates to adapt the scaling factor SF, by either increasing or decreasing the value of the scaling factor SF, as required in response to characteristics of the data being processed. This aspect of the invention also makes it unnecessary to attempt to predict the characteristics of the data to be processed upon initially setting the value of the scaling factor.

A scheduler configured in accordance with the present invention can also adapt to changes in a stream of data by increasing or decreasing the scaling factor SF as the situation requires. Thus the scheduler may, for example, increase the scaling factor SF during an initial period of operation, then may decrease the scaling factor SF in response to a change in the pattern of data traffic, and further may increase the scaling factor SF again in response to another change in the pattern of data traffic.

Noting again that plural scheduling queues (e.g., 64) may be maintained in the inventive scheduler, it should be understood that respective scaling factors SF of the scheduling queues are advantageously to be adjusted independently of one another. Consequently, in a typical

situation in accordance with the invention, different values of scaling factors are applicable to different scheduling queues at any given time.

The processes of FIG. 4-6B may be implemented in hardware, software or a combination thereof. In at least one embodiment of the invention, the processes of FIGS. 4-6B are implemented in hardware employing a suitable combination of conventional logic circuitry such as adders, comparators, selectors, etc. Such hardware may be located, for example, within the scheduler 34 and/or the scheduler 38 (FIG. 2). A person of ordinary skill in the art may develop logic circuitry capable of performing the inventive processes described with reference to FIGS. 4-6B. In a software embodiment of the invention, the processes of FIGS. 4-6B may comprise one or more computer program products. Each inventive computer program product may be carried by a medium readable by a computer (e.g., a carrier wave signal, a floppy disk, a hard drive, a random access memory, etc.).

The foregoing description discloses only exemplary embodiments of the invention; modifications of the above disclosed apparatus and methods which fall within the scope of the invention will be readily apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art. According to one alternative embodiment, a scheduling queue may have plural subqueues of different ranges and resolutions, according to an invention disclosed in co-pending patent application Serial No. _____, filed _____ (Attorney Docket No. ROC920010199US1). This co-pending patent application is incorporated herein by reference.

Moreover, in the above description, the invention has been implemented in a separate scheduler chip associated

with a network processor. However, it is also contemplated to implement the invention in a scheduler circuit that is implemented as part of a data flow chip or as part of a processor chip.

5 Furthermore, in accordance with above-disclosed embodiments of the invention, reduction of the scaling factor SF has been triggered by underutilization of the range of the scheduling queue, where underutilization has been effectively defined as attaching flows repeatedly in
10 the lower half of the scheduling queue. It is alternatively contemplated, however, to define underutilization of the range of the scheduling queue in other ways. For example, underutilization may be deemed to have occurred upon repeated attachment of flows in the lower third or lower
15 quarter of the scheduling queue.

Accordingly, while the present invention has been disclosed in connection with exemplary embodiments thereof, it should be understood that other embodiments may fall within the spirit and scope of the invention, as defined by
20 the following claims.